

BODMIN LANDSCAPE PROJECT
LESKERNICK HILL 1998
PROJECT DIARY
CLIFF SAMPSON

Bodmin Moor 1998

Project Diary

CLIFF SAMPSON

Sunday 24 May

Arrived late owing to a back strain sustained while digging at Bletchingley last Sunday.

Too late to join Sue Hamilton and the others at the Leskerrick site, so I drove to ~~the~~ Rough Tor carpark and walked up Rough Tor, Little Rough Tor and then on to Brown Willy, the highest point in Bodmin Moor.

The grass is surprisingly dry, the weather cool, the wind chilly.

A number of people about but not beyond Rough Tor. Round hilly countryside. Cattle, sheep and horses grazing, few wild flowers, no arable land in sight.

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Monday 25th May

Car would not start, got a lift from Ash to the site.

A long walk from Bowthick to Leskernick Hill, alongside the old leats from the tin mining days, crossing a large gully made by the tin miners.

Helped Justin lay out the grid around and across the South Stone Circle. (About 20 metres across)

Sharpened some pegs for more survey work.

Just before lunch joined a larger group under Mike Seeger-Thomas who were quadranting a stone structure (circular hut base?)

Left a little early to buy wood bolts etc to make 3 sieves.

Hall & Co closed (Bank Holiday).

Picked up Gary at Safeways.

Weather warmer today, some sunshine.

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Tuesday 26th May

Car still will not start, went to Bodmin, to Hall & Co, with Sue Harraton in her van. We went to buy wood, bolts, washers, buckets, nuts and drills.

These were bought in order to make 3 sieve trays and stands. After our purchases we went to the Leskernick site, parking the van at Westmoor Gate.

It took 2 trips from Westmoorgate to the main site on Leskernick Hill, carrying the wood and buckets.

The weather improved during the day, sunshine in the late afternoon.

Sue Harraton and I started work on the sieve trays and frames.

Everyone went to the Rising Sun at Altarnun, stayed there for a meal while Sue Harraton went to pick up Richard Hoyle from Bodmin Parkway Station.

He did not turn up.

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Wed 27th May 1998

Began the day by rolling over in bed and falling out of it.

Cut my arm and did not improve my still uncomfortable back.

On site at Lerkemick, spent the day making sieves frames and trays with Sue who teaches furniture making at evening classes.

Frames look good, 1 completed, 2 nearly done.

Chris Tilley put up a line of flags along the Stone ~~that~~ Row which runs roughly NE from 187798. It made what was a hard to see feature highly visible, and perhaps helped us to see this feature in a new light, stressing its significance.

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Thurs 28th May.

Sunshine and heavy showers.
On Leskernick Hill again, today
went straight to the toolstore at the
south of the hill and to the ring
shaped stone structure south of
structure 39 where Sue and I
were doing the carpentry.

It is interesting that we auto-
matically divided this place up
into activity areas, for raw
materials, tools, partly and finished
components (storage areas) and sawing
and drilling areas. (Activity areas).

The 3 sieves are almost
finished, we could not however
glue the corner inserts in the rain
but the addition of handles is a
useful modification.

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Friday 29th May.

Normally a day off but volunteered to work on site with Chris Tilley, and Crystal. Sue Harraton also had volunteered and we went to the site via Camelford (Pasties) and on to the Westmoorgate entrance.

A wet and blustery day which was spent wrapping certain stones with cling film and then painting them white.

This is not as bizarre as it sounds for the object of this exercise is to determine those stones which have been positioned by people (normally those which are on edge) and those which are in particular formations and/or positions. This makes the selected stones stand out from the others. Photographs were then taken.

Because of the weather, almost continual rain, we finished at about 1530.

Mark joined us in Caravan 27

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Sat 30th May.

The usual day off for all of us is Friday but as I worked yesterday, Today was my day off and I took the opportunity to do some laundry and shopping.

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Sunday 31st May

Went on to Bodmin Moor via Westmoorgate rather than Bowithuk. Finished glueing the triangular section in the corners of the sieves (these had to be cut length-ways from boards).

Troubling in quadrant of "hut" 39, removing the turf.

Very few finds have come from this feature, 2 or 3 pieces of Bronze Age pottery, hardly any charcoal, very odd for a settlement site especially when you see how substantial the stone walls are, orthostats and rubble, no real dry stone walling, no "dressed" stone but much effort has been put into building the circular walls and "field" boundaries with large granite stones, (roughly tabular). It may be that the orthostats were placed first and the rubble was packed between them but it might also

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be that a rubble wall was built first and the orthostats leant against them.

The lack of hearths (so far) seems very strange, cooking may have been done outside but this seems unlikely in view of the wind and the damp.

Monday June 1st. 1998

Via Bowthick which is now our usual way on to the moor.

To structure 39 for more de-turfing, this time in the top right hand quadrant (looking up the hill).

The stones of this and other similar structures lean inwards, the effect is like looking at the remains of a huge stone igloo.

The entrance to structure 39 is at its downslope point and appears to be oriented on the stone circles.

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Tuesday June 2nd.

Weather bad, rain, wind, cold.
Had a site tour, Sue showed us
what other people had been doing,
trying to find out the sequence
of building of the walls, where
they butted on to other walls and
which stones were earthfast.
Boots leaking badly.

More trowelling, deturfing
the walls in the south west quadrant
of structure 39.

Going ~~home~~ back to Bowithick
went over Leekernick Hill at a
somewhat wrong angle and
went down the wrong valley.
Eventually arrived at Bowithick
to find vehicles gone but a note
from Mike saying that I would
be picked up. Then Mark and
Simon came with the jeep.
I left a note for Mike and
we returned in the jeep to Tuliots.
Much ribbing from all.

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Wednesday June 3rd.

Helped to rebuild North Stone Circle turf stack which had been vandalised by the cows which like to lick the minerals out of the earthy parts.

In the afternoon worked on the near lefthand quadrant just outside the wall. Box section cut to show whether or not the stones are clast or matrix supported.

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Thursday 4th ~~May~~ June

The sun is shining!

Turf stack from North Stone Circle relatively undisturbed by the cows. Worked on the North Stone Circle with Chris and Diane, trowelling down to the natural.

The trench with the standing stone and other stones on the levelled surface looks like a Zen garden. Soil appears to be thicker than that on the hillside but still only a few inches thick.

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Friday 5th May June

Day off, spent most of the time with the car.

Car started straight away using Mark's jump leads and his jeep.

This means that the fault probably lay with the battery.

At the garage they had no batteries with the terminals in the correct position for the Fiat 127 but the garage proprietor said that he could get one by lunchtime.

Eventually I went back to the caravan (27) and the garage lady drove the car, with the new battery in it, to the caravan and I then ran her back to the garage. Pretty good service

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Sat 6th ~~May~~ June

Another wet day

Remade the North Circle turf stack.
Finished cutting a section in the
standing stone trench.

After lunch some more work on
a turf stack nearer to structure (hut) 39.

Left early to get an 8 mm ~~butt~~ nut
for one of the wheelbarrows and
some galvanised washers for the
sieves. Went shopping in Safeways
(Bodmin) for supplies of food etc
and later picked up Sarah, an
anthropologist, from the station
(Bodmin Parkway) which is miles out
of the town.

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Sun 7th May June

A site tour this morning to keep us up to date and because Penny had arrived who was an old hand on the site.

Mixed weather today.

Worked on the bottom left quadrant of structure 39, working on the box section to get it into the right state for photography.

Put the extra washers on the sieves.

Mon 8th ~~Mar~~ June

An appalling day weatherwise

It was drizzling when we set off from Tuliots Caravan Park. this time I drove to the Westmoorgate and from there the rain increased as we walked to the tool store.

We went to our usual various trenches and features and I was in the bottom right quadrant while the rain and wind increased. There I was removing rock stone and spilt, most of the time Sue did the bucketing to the spoil heap and rock pile.

My boots were soaked through by this time and everyone was getting cold and wet.

We stopped work at about 12 when Sue called it a day.

Back to the caravan for lunch and later drove Richard & Mark to Boscastle where ~~we~~ I bought some boots from an outdoor clothing shop (Clovelly Clothing).

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Tues 9th June

A day with showers, some heavy and a few brief periods of sunshine, very windy.

More trowelling in the bottom right hand corner of 39. Removed stone and loose fill (probably bio-turbation) from this section. Q4

A handle has broken off one of the sieves, I shall have to replace it, Patrick the anthropologist asked for questions, I asked him. —

Could the hut entrances be oriented in other directions other than to prominent hill features etc (which may be ritual) i.e. downslope, easterly, or towards one another?

If an entrance faces down the slope it faces away from the hill on which it stands, if the entrance was up slope only the hill on which it stands can be seen.

To see prominent natural features an entrance therefore has to be on the down slope or at the

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side. If a house, round or otherwise, is built on a slope, the down side walls are usually built up to obtain a horizontal wall top from which the roof springs, this gives more headroom on the downward side of the house, an advantage for choosing this position for a door. Another advantage of having the door on the downside is that water drains away from the door.

If you put the entrance up the slope then, unless you provide some sort of sill, the water will tend to run into the house from the hillside above.

Books on camping often stress that the best position for a tent is with the door facing east or south to catch the sun in the morning.

Could it be that this is why the ~~stone~~^{heuk} circles on Jespersen Hill are only on the eastern and southern sides?

Wed 10th June 1998

The weather is a great determining factor in our lives and the forecasts on the television are watched with interest morning and evening.

Today it was sunshine and showers, some of them heavy.

Finished cleaning the south facing section of Q4 which Mike then photographed.

Gillie came to visit us, it was good to see her again, she got a 2/1 and was both pleased and relieved about it.

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Thurs 11th June 1998

Working on Field Station 1 with
Nick (The Shrine Stone) deturbing.
More sunshine today but a strong
cold wind.

In the afternoon I was interviewed
by Patrick.

Went to the Rising Sun on the way
home.

A drink in the bar after supper.

Then a party in our caravan.

Dan's last evening with us.

Charades until 2.30 AM.

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Friday 12th June

A day off for laundry & shopping,
Dropped Dan off at Bodmin Parkway
Station for his train to London.

Wrote some postcards.

Showers in the morning, sunny in the
afternoon, clouded over in the evening
Mark moved out of the caravan
and Lesley moved in.

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Sat 13th June 1998

Start delayed due to bad weather.
Arrived site one hour later than
normally. Worked at Field Station
1 until lunch time, ~~getting~~ ready for
a photograph. Pm Helped with
photography at Gary's top wall junction
trench. Establishing TBM's with
Ash.

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Sun 14th June 1998

Somewhat better weather today.
To Bowthick in Sharon's VR Van
With After site tour by Sue in the
morning I was bailing out one of
Gary's wall trenches (the most westerly one)
with Ken. PM. helped to clean more
wall trenches and prepared and helped
Lesley with photography.

Tried to fix Sue's secateurs and
Justin's metal tape, secateurs OK but
spring broken in metal tape.

Visit to site of Cornish/Devon
Archaeology group.

Richard may be moving into our
Caravan.

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Hostages taken in the present
to extract meaning out of the past.

Mon 15th June 1998

A fine day!

Gianna's Sharon's VW van broke down last night so this morning I took the Fiat to Westmoorgate with Justin, and Andrew. Sue took us to a spot where there were 3 stones still wrapped and painted white. She spoke about the Art side of the project which I do not see as art except in the broad sense that includes clouds, landscapes, seascapes, natural rock formation, moonlight, lambs, calves, horses and especially foals.

These have the elements of objet trouvé about them, chosen by the onlooker, recognized for their aesthetic qualities.

The wrapped stones sometimes appear to me as beacons or way markers, sometimes as pieces of mummies, as plastered pieces of anatomy or, as today, as prisoners or hostages waiting for release.

A problem with my left eye which

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seems to have had grit in it for days and is worse now.

I bought some Optrex in the Co-op today, I hope that it will do the trick.

JUNE

Tuesday 16th ~~May~~ 1998

Weatherwise the best day yet.

Took the car to Bowthick today (Hut 39)

Worked on a small space in the
stone wall which looked promising as
a niche or cache but the feature petered
out. My left eye was much better
today after using the Optrex.

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WES 17th ~~Aug~~ June

My eye is still troubling me but the Optrex helps.

Working on hut 39 again, finished the space outside the wall of quadrant 2. 3 helicopters were chasing each other around like giant insects in nuptial flight. Fine weather over, started to rain late morning.

In the afternoon worked on section inside the walls of quadrant 2, again no feature and only one find - a piece of quartz.

Slipped and fell on one of the slate stepping stones, just bruised.

Richard moved in, certain conditions have been laid down.

In the evening picked up Hanna from Badmin Parkway Station.

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Thursday 18th June 1998

To Bowthick in Sharon's VW covelette
Dry at first and then showers
until lunchtime.

Trowelling nooks and crannies in
the second quadrant

A small mystery solved.

Why is Westmoorgate at the East
of the Bodmin Moor.

Reason. because there are two moors
East and West.

Westmoorgate has access to West
Moor and there is an Eastmoorgate
on the edge of East Moor.

Slipped on hillside on route to
Bowthick, thought I had hurt my
left ankle but it seems to be OK.

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Friday 19th June

Our day off today and it is fine and quite hot. Went shopping at the Co-op. then off to Boscastle with Elizabeth and Richard. Bought a fleece so it will probably stay warm.

We had a cream tea, looked around the picturesque little harbour, nothing much in the intertidal zone, causeways into the water.

Left ankle ok but right knee stiff hope that it is ok for tomorrow, had a little difficulty negotiating the stone (mostly slate) stairs of Tintagel.

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Sat 20th June

Rain in the early morning but it died away and only a few spots were falling en route to Westmoorgate.

I actually arrived at the tool store in reasonable time with only half the complement there.

Worked on Hut 39 and was interviewed by Tony, one of the anthropologists, about the photograph that I had taken to symbolize what I felt about the landscape and the project.

My photograph showed hut circle 40 where we sat to have our beers, in the background was Brown Willy, the highest point on the moor and which is a good indicator of the weather, it showed one of the sieves that Sue Harraton and I had made and it showed Sue Hamilton, Mike Seeger-Thomas, Simon Smith and Mark Sandymore.

They all represented what I like about archaeology, learning, work and camaraderie, People, Places and Discovery.

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In the afternoon Barbara Bender took us on a walk around the site and showed us the features from the anthropologists' point of view.

Very interesting. I must read Chris Tilley's book on the ^(he gave us a) ~~talk~~ Phenomenology of Landscape.

The anthropologists' ideas look much more likely when they can be demonstrated but they do appear to read a lot into the landscape features. The eye of faith seems to be permanently open. Perhaps more knowledge of their subject would revise this opinion.

Sun 21st June

Bandaged Lesley's swollen ankle and drove her to Westmoorgate.

Troulling in hut 39 again, mostly outside quadrant Z.

Quite a fine day except after lunch when there was a heavy shower. I left it too late to put my waterproof trousers on and my activity trousers got wet. However they dried quickly for they are poly/cotton.

Richard cooked Spaghetti Carbonara this evening, it was good.

This evening he moved back to caravan 37, with Jan, Jenni and Hanna for Nick has just gone.

Useful things on another trip would be antiseptic wipes such as we use on the foreshore, a nail brush and an unbreakable flask too.

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Mon 22nd June.

A fine day, sunny but not too hot. Sharon's minibus broke down today so I took Hanaa to Westmoorgate. Lesley was photographing with the anthropologists.

Worked with Fay on the Shrine Stone (Field Feature 1) cutting a section through the cobbles to the base of the main stone.

I have observed that the sheep will clamber among the rocks, goats would do likewise. The ponies can occasionally be seen in among the rocks but the cattle seem to be the domestic animals which keep to the more open ground.

The cattle will disturb the turf heaps and I recall Peter Reynolds saying they will pull thatch off the roofs at Butser.

Might the Leskernick type stone walls be to divide different types of animals? The hut circles appear

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to be almost always within a stone walled areas. Perhaps the stone walls protect thatch or turf roofs, hay ricks etc from the depredations of the larger animals? Artificial barriers separating upland from lowland animals?

It might be possible to see if this division of animals is happening by conducting a ~~land~~^{DUNG} Survey, checking the areas within the stone walls to see which have been visited and manured by which type of animal.

Many of the hut circles appear to be in clusters surrounded by a wall with walls butting on to the cluster wall. Sue referred to a possible cattlegrid effect.

Hut clusters appear to be nuclei from which the fields tend to radiate like the petals of flowers.

Tues 23rd June

Took Marion and Patrick to Bowthick, very misty on high ground such as the old airfield, much less so lower at Camelford or Bowthick.

Returned straight away to Tuhot. Well and picked up Sue who needed to phone the institute.

Coffee in Camelford.

On site later worked on Field Feature 1 (The Shrine Stone) with Fay, Lerley and Sharon. back-filling with stones and earth preparatory to re-turfing.

Weather picked up in the afternoon.

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Wed 24th June 1998

Another damp and misty start.
Drove to Westmoorgate with Lesley
and Marion.

Backfilling in Hut circle 39.

Many heavy stones had to be moved
from the stone pile, much earth
and finally the turf.

Perhaps it would be a good idea
to photograph (Polaroid?) each
feature, before it was excavated,
to show how it was originally.
~~so that~~ In this way the feature
can be reconstructed more faithfully,
as well as providing a "before"
photo to go with the "after" one.
A photo a year later might be
of interest. (in trench diary?)

Late afternoon washed &
cleaned a number of spare
tools.

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Thurs 25th June

A day of backfilling at Leshemick where the major excavation, that of Hut circle 39 is coming to an end. As we were backfilling, ~~where~~ the bank was being taken out and another posthole was found. As these are definitely of human origin and indicate the presence of a roof, they are of considerable interest in a site that is short of artifacts and cultural features.

Another one of those days when the weather is wet and windy initially and improves through the day.

Project party in Barbera's caravan. but had to leave early to make sure of an early start tomorrow.

Many questions still unanswered. Why would people chose to live in such an unpromising site? Why so few artefacts? Was hut 39 only used for a short time? Was it a transhumance site? All the year round, pastoral or ritual site? How much has the

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climate, soil, environment changed
since the site was occupied.

Is hut circle 39 a typical hut circle
or do others need to be excavated to
provide a good sample?

Hopefully our work will result in some
answers to these questions.

Some hut circles may have been work
or storage areas rather than homes.

Friday 26th June.

The last day on site for the team this year.

An early start so as to take Simon and Hanna to Bodmin Parkway station. We had to leave at 0715 to be sure of catching the 0816 train for London. Wet and windy all the time on site, time spent tidying up, improving the appearance of the site and, clearing the tools and bringing them to the position where they can be picked up by a Landrover from Westmoozgate.

Everyone tired, as much a result of the weather than the physical effort of walking in and off site and doing the actual job.

Competition between the younger males may have speeded the work up to a certain extent but it was an effort that would have been unsustainable over a longer period.

Despite these things it has been an enjoyable and interesting piece of field work and I may well

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return to Leskernick next year,
health and other factors permitting.

It is much more interesting and
enjoyable to see a project through
to the end than to just be there
for part of it.

